

**ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS**

	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Cabinet Member and Advisors – Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods</b>
	<b>Date</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>
	<b>Title</b>	<b>Historic Warden Functions – Neighbourhood Centres</b>
	<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Neighbourhoods &amp; Adult Services</b>

### **Summary**

The merger of the Sheltered Housing Wardens and Home Enablers was approved by Cabinet Members on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010. Historically some non core business tasks were undertaken by the Sheltered Housing Wardens and are not compatible with the new merged service.

### **Recommendations**

#### **That Members:**

- 1. Approves the transfer of functions identified in section 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 of this paper**
- 2. Approves commencement of a consultation exercise with tenants identified in 7.8, 7.9 ,7.10, 7.11 and accepts a further report with outcomes from the consultation in November 2011**

- 7. Proposals and Details** A review of neighbourhood centres commenced in December 2008. It was agreed that the Neighbourhood Investment Service would lead on the review following a similar format to the garage site review. This involved the appraisal of 58 communal facilities located across the Borough which has now been completed. The outcome of this review was to retain 56 of the Neighbourhood Centres and convert 2 Centres to living accommodation.

A further four larger indoor neighbourhood centre units fell outside the scope of this project; however this report makes reference to the outside units that have a laundry facility on site.

During this same period the proposed merger of the Sheltered Housing Warden service and Home Enabling Service was undertaken. This paper focuses on an element of the non core business tasks that were historically undertaken by Sheltered Housing Wardens, but would not be undertaken by the new merged service.

The report focuses on specific tasks that can be undertaken by EDS through a Facilities Management Framework, and of tasks that can continue to be managed by the Neighbourhood Centre Manager within the remit of NAS.

### **7.1 EDS New Facilities Management Framework**

Due to the complexity of the tasks it has become clear that Environment and Development Services (EDS) need to develop a facilities management framework to meet all NAS requirements. The framework will need to be bespoke for each individual site. The framework will set the foundations for fee proposals based on the tasks undertaken across the neighbourhood centre portfolio. The tasks under the framework will need to be clearly identified by EDS. It is envisaged that some of the tasks that will be undertaken by EDS will be done via the HRA funded team and therefore the fee would not apply. It is proposed that the Neighbourhood Centre Manager works closely with the HRA staff team in order to identify areas that can be supported.

It is proposed that the following areas of responsibility are handed over to EDS under SLA arrangements:-

### **7.2 Cleaning**

The merger of the Home Care Enablers and Sheltered Housing Wardens has resulted in a shift in who undertakes the cleaning function of the neighbourhood centres. It is proposed that the cleaning function will also be handed over to EDS under an SLA. EDS have already indicated that the annual charge for this service will be in the region of £146,908.05 which has been negotiated with EDS to ensure that the levels of cleaning are kept to a minimum and are specific to the individual needs of the Neighbourhood Centres.

### **7.3 Annual Programming**

It has been identified that there are a number of other tasks that need to be undertaken as part of the facilities management framework, a part of which subject to agreement can potentially be undertaken by the NAS team based within facilities management.

- Resetting of time clocks on heating systems to accommodate summer /winter hours
- PAT testing ,5yearly fixed wire test ,and Gas Safety Checks  
Asbestos checks
- Annual service of fire alarms, fire doors, portable fire fighting equipment if any EG. Extinguishers
- Decommissioning of the remainder of communal pay phones.
- Identify efficiency savings and work with Neighbourhood Centres manager and partners to resolve
- Establish and prioritise forward investment programme
- Support management function with Neighbourhood centres manager and relevant in house teams

### **7.4 Work to be retained by Neighbourhood and Adult Services**

#### **7.4.1 Legionella Testing**

It is recommended that the legionella testing and running of taps as an interim solution will be managed by the Neighbourhood Centre Manager and Home Enablers until the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011. This function will then be formally handed over to Neighbourhood Champions on a permanent basis. It is proposed that the Neighbourhood Centre Manager speaks to the Corporate Health and Safety Team to ensure that the appropriate training and procedures are put in place for monitoring purposes.

#### **7.5 Fire Alarm Testing**

The Neighbourhood Centres are currently utilised by different groups, and RMBC departments. The Neighbourhood Housing Officer Teams have approached the Neighbourhood Centre Manager in relation to using the Neighbourhood Centres across the borough as a drop in base for staff. Any group who utilises the centre for such use pays an annual fee towards the running of the centre, and a Service Level Agreement is put into place.

A discussion has taken place between the Neighbourhood Centre Manager and the Head of Operations North to discuss the feasibility of this option. As a result it is proposed that the Neighbourhood Housing Officers whom work geographically should test the fire alarms as required in all Neighbourhood Centres from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011. Further discussions between the Neighbourhood Centre Manager and the Head of Operations Manager have commenced to ensure that an agreement is put in place and effectively managed.

In the interim to provide assistance to the Neighbourhood Centre Manager it has been agreed that the Home Enabling Officers will carry out the weekly testing of Fire Alarms with immediate effect which will hand over to the Champions from the 1 October 2011. Whilst this duty is not a core function of the Enablers Job Description it has been determined that the staff group can pick up the testing of fire alarms and other functions in the available time for a short term period of 6 – 8 weeks.

The Neighbourhood Centre Manager will work with the Enablers to ensure that they are familiar with the procedure and liaise with Corporate Health and Safety to ensure necessary processes are being adhered to.

## **7.6 Neighbourhood Centre Manager**

Historically the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has funded the Neighbourhood Centre Manager post. For the short term it is proposed that this role continues to be funded through the HRA and the post remains within the NAS Directorate to focus on the development of the centres, supporting tenants and residents and acting as a coordinator for the SLA with EDS. It is proposed that the future of this post is delivered in line with the new service; and that this is then embedded into the role of the Home Enabler, and combined within the current duties of the Neighbourhood Champions.

## **7.7 Activity Co-ordination**

Sheltered Housing Wardens were responsible for undertaking communal activities. This role has been assimilated into the new merged job descriptions of Home Enabler. This will offer the new service a more flexible approach to how it delivers activities moving forward. One aspect that will not be covered by the new merged service is the collection of fees from non residents who attend activities to satisfy the Local Government Ombudsman Ruling. It is proposed that this function should be undertaken directly by residents, or a TARA if in operation; with additional support from the Neighbourhood Centre Manager. This would include setting up and monitoring the arrangements for funding to be deposited into the HRA Account.

## 7.8 Guest Bedrooms

The report to the Cabinet Member on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2008 highlighted concerns with the limited use of the guest bedroom facility offered on many of the schemes and the health and safety aspects of continuing to offer this facility.

The proposal was to change the use of this room to create small community drop in bases for the use of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council staff. During the consultation around the use of the centres in 2008 a small number of tenants expressed the view that the guest bedroom was an important part of their tenancy agreement and it benefits them if they live in a one bedroom bungalow and they have family to stay with them. This opinion is not however reflected in the usage of this facility more broadly across the schemes.

Most guest bedrooms have not been utilised for many months/years, and in the centres that are used it is usually limited to 2/3 times a year. The current charge for guest bedrooms is 75p for the first night and 50p a night thereafter. This subsidised rate adds further pressure on a limited budget.

Legionella risk assessments of all the neighbourhood centres has identified that the infrequently used guest bedrooms pose a high Legionella risk as standing water is a major factor in the spread of Legionella. These issues are now compounded by the merger of the Sheltered Housing Warden staff as there is not dedicated staff to collect payment or clean and make the beds for visitors.

It is proposed that a re-evaluation of the guest bedrooms is undertaken and that following contact with customers regarding the usage of the bedrooms in 2008; that further consultation is undertaken to gain a customer perspective on the future of guest bedrooms. The options to be discussed with customers should include:-

- Retaining guest bedrooms for use of family members, and review current charging protocols.
- Potential for usage as community drop in bases for the use of RMBC staff.
- Potential meeting rooms
- Potential use for storage

A consultation programme which will include customer questionnaires, and offer of further face to face meetings should be carried out jointly with the service quality team.

## **7.9 Laundry Facilities**

At present 56 out of the 62 centres across the borough currently have a laundry facility which tenants who pay the communal facility charge and live on the scheme access. This is due to many of the bungalows not having sufficient room for a washer and drier to be retained in their property. The washer and driers that are in the communal facilities are currently charged for at a rate of £1.00 per wash and £1.00 per dry. The payment method for this is operated on an honesty system, which is open to abuse.

Due to the complexity of collecting monies it is recommended that this function is incorporated into the tenants rent and paid for as part of the communal facility charge. As a result it is recommended that the weekly communal facility charge is increased from the current £4.08/£4.16 after April 1st 2012 to a flat rate of £5.00 on schemes that have a laundry facility and collected via the OHMS system (On line Housing Management System). It is proposed that a consultation programme would commence in September 2011 to inform customers. This would involve meetings in the Neighbourhood Centres borough wide to consult with all customers. There will need to be a clear plan for customers who do not have access to an on site Laundry Facility and therefore the increase to £5.00 would not apply. This decision would need to be carefully managed and explained to customers to mitigate potential complaints or opt out requests.

By collecting the laundry monies via the rent it will eliminate the need to allocate resources to physically collect and pay in the money on a regular basis. It will also eliminate any potential threats to staff that would potentially be carrying large amounts of money.

In the short term to allow the consultation process to take place it has been agreed that the Home Enablers will work with the Neighbourhood Centre Manager on a short term basis, to assist with collection of laundry money. This duty will then transfer to Neighbourhood Champions from the 1 October 2011 to ensure that monies are collected from all Centres.

It should be noted that a variety of options have been looked at in relation to the most feasible way forward into collection and management of the laundry. These have included: - coin operated machines, which proved to be extremely costly in the region of £250,000 and would need extensive work in relation to plumbing. Collection of monies via other resources such as on site enablers/EDS and the potential removal of the laundry facility have also been exhausted.

## **7.10 Communal Payphones**

It is recommended that a consultation exercise is undertaken on the potential to remove communal payphones. This will need to take into account current usage, and any issues or objections customers may have in the removal of the facility.

## **7.11 Consultation**

The Neighbourhood Centre Manager will commence a consultation programme on the below proposals. This should commence in September 2011.

- Change of use to existing Guest Bedrooms
- Increase of existing Laundry Charges to include impact on Housing Benefit and interim arrangements for collection of monies
- Removal/decommissioning of payphones
- Finalised comments and analysis to J Moorcroft/D Stevenson to formulate report

## **8. Finance**

**8.1** All tenants who reside on a Sheltered or Aged Persons Scheme with a communal facility pay £4.16 per week communal facility charge. This is payable whether or not they use the communal facilities. The annual combined income for indoor and outdoor units is estimated currently at £447,449. This figure is made up of 2326 properties X the weekly charge X the 48 rental weeks, with an allowance of voids at 1.7% based on current amounts throughout the year.

The figure of 2326 properties has been taken from the OHMS (Online Housing Management System) and therefore is a true reflection of the payments that are being collected currently.

Based on the 2326 properties by increasing the communal facility charge to £5.00 this would create an additional £93,784 per annum. This figure is taking into account the increased communal facility charge from £4.08 to £4.16 from April 2012.

By decommissioning the remaining pay phones within the Neighbourhood Centres this will result in a saving of line rental to BT which is currently paid at approximately £14,660 per annum. However the cost from EDS Facilities Management in relation to the programme for decommissioning the phones has not been finalised.

**8.1** There are already some annual activities which EDS coordinate so that the Council complies with health and safety legislation:

- Asbestos monitoring procedure
- Legionnella checks
- Fire risk assessments
- Electrical PAT testing
- Servicing of laundry equipment

EDS facilities management quoted £60,000 per annum to undertake this work and this Health and Safety work is now in progress. The additional costs associated with new SLA activity will need to be contained within the available budget.

## **9. Risks and uncertainties**

- 9.1** In relation to the collection of monies from non residents there is a risk that this could be mismanaged and money not paid appropriately into the HRA account. This arrangement will be overseen by Home Enablers Officers in the interim until a resolution has been sought on an alternative collection method.
- 9.2** There are some uncertainties around the functions that can be carried out by the NAS based staff within EDS. These functions will need to be clearly set out in the framework.
- 9.3** In relation to the testing of fire alarms there is a risk of an oversight of testing as the completion of this task is one that relies on other people.
- 9.4** There is a risk that by changing the Communal Facilities Charging Structure that it may affect eligibility for Housing Benefit which would affect a significant number of customers. A consultation programme would need to be in place to ensure that all customers were made aware of this change
- 9.5** Although the Communal Facilities fee is one that is mandatory there is a risk that the increase of the Communal Facilities fee to £5.00 would generate a number of opt out requests. In order to mitigate this risk there would be a requirement for a consultation period which would aim to explain the rationale behind the increase in charge, and collate any feedback.
- 9.6** There is also a risk that if the option around increasing the charge to £5.00 was agreed that there may be a greater usage of the facilities which would result in an increase in energy bills. There is therefore a



requirement for the Neighbourhood Centre Manager to robustly monitor and manage the budget and usage.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Neighbourhood centres have the potential to be a thriving community resource to assist and support older people and vulnerable people to live independently whilst offering opportunities to act as a base for more integrated local service delivery. However since they were developed, the use of the centres, the social profile of the tenants and the role of the warden has changed significantly and many now require refurbishment to a modern, contemporary standard. Policy developments around self directed support and enabling older people to retain their independence does not necessarily mean that older people will want to use an on site facility, preferring instead to access community and commercial facilities available to the wider community.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation:-**

- Sheltered Housing Community Building Review – 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2007
- Neighbourhood Centres Review update – 29 September 2008
- Sheltered Housing Review of Charges- 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009
- Neighbourhood Centres Update – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Contact Name (s):

**Shona McFarlane, Director of Health and Wellbeing**

**Dave Richmond, Director of Housing & neighbourhoods**

Telephone: **01709 382121 ext 3928**